(e) The industrial production in the last month has shown an increase.

Agreement between America and India to remove restrictions

†308. SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that an agreement has been entered into between America and India recently to the effect that all the restrictions imposed on India, so far, will be removed by 1st April, 2001;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that as per the agreements of World Trade Organisation these restrictions are to be removed by the year 2003;

(c) if so, the reasons for removing these restrictions two years earlier; and

(d) the expected benefits to be accrued to the country?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (d) India has been maintaining Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) on imports for Balance of Payments (BOP) reasons. In January 1997, following an improvement in its BOP position the "Committee on BOP Restrictions" of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) invited India to present a phase out Plan for elimination of its remaining QRs maintained for BOP purposes. India presented a nine year phase out plan for removal of its QRs, which was further reduced to seven years but even this was not acceptable to a number of India's trading partners. Consequently, the Committee concluded its consultations without any decision.

Subsequently, India held consultations and signed bilateral agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, European Union and Japan for a six year phase out of its QRs on BOP grounds by 31.3.2003. However, such consultations with USA did not fructify and the USA initiated a dispute against India in the WTO. The Dispute Settlement Panel and the Appellate Body ruled against India holding that India was not justified in maintaining its QRs on BOP grounds. Following adoption of these reports by the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), a Reasonable Period of Time (RPT) had to be determined for India to implement the rulings and recommendations of the DSB. The RPT can be determined either through arbitration where the maximum period

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

normally granted is 15 months or through bilateral agreement between parties to the dispute. India and the USA have signed a bilateral agreement for determining the RPT, which would be of little over 18 months. As per the agreement, all the existing QRs on BOP grounds would have to be removed by 1.4.2001.

Sick tea gardens in Himachal Pradesh

309. SHRI ANIL SHARMA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of sick tea gardens in the public sector and also in private sector in Himachal Pradesh with their locations;

(b) what steps Government propose to take to remove there sickness;

(c) whether the Government consider merger of small and unviable tea estates; and

(d) if so, details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (d) There is no Public Sector or Private Sector tea garden in Himachal Pradesh and hence the question of sick tea gardens in these sectors does not arise. However, there is a large concentration of small holdings numbering 3679 with an area of 2325 ha. being the total area under tea in the State.

Trade protocol signed between India and Russia

310. SHRI RAMACHANDRAIAH RUMANDLA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Russia have signed a trade protocol in Delhi in January, 2000;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken to utilize Russian rupee debt funds?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) A Protocol was signed during the Sixth Session of the Indo-Russian Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation, held at New Delhi in January, 2000, under the aegis of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological and Cultural Co-operation. Various bilateral trade related issues including